



U.S. Department of Justice

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PRESS RELEASE

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District Man Convicted of First Degree Felony Murder In Death of 21-Month-Old Boy

WASHINGTON - Jonathan M. Austin, 35, of the District of Columbia, was convicted today of charges of first degree felony murder with aggravating circumstances and first degree child cruelty in the death of a 21-month-old boy, U.S. Attorney Ronald C. Machen Jr. announced.

The verdicts were returned by a jury in the Superior Court of the District of Columbia. The Honorable Judge Jennifer Anderson scheduled sentencing for January 28, 2011.

According to evidence presented at trial, on November 16, 2008, at approximately 3:30 p.m., Ronjai Butler, age 21 months, arrived at the emergency room of Howard University Hospital in full cardio-pulmonary arrest. Efforts to revive him were futile.

Subsequently, it appeared that the child had suffered multiple bruises to the head and body. A full autopsy was performed by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. It was determined that Ronjai had suffered multiple bruises and contusions. He also suffered a depressed skull fracture of the left side of his head. It also was determined that he had suffered multiple rib fractures and laceration to the lungs, liver, spleen, and kidneys. The cause of death was blunt force trauma to the head that resulted in brain swelling and death. The death was ruled a homicide.

An investigation revealed that Austin had been left alone with Ronjai and the boy's 3 1/2-year-old sister while the mother and an older sibling went to the grocery store. The defendant is not related to any of the children and was the mother's boyfriend. When the mother returned to her apartment on North Capitol Street NW, she found Ronjai semi-conscious. Austin claimed that nothing happened and put Ronjai in the bathtub and splashed cold water on him. At trial, Austin claimed that the child was chronically ill and died of natural causes. An expert witness testified that the multiple injuries occurred post-mortem.

In announcing the verdict, U.S. Attorney Machen praised the investigative efforts of Metropolitan Police Department Detectives Robert Jackson, Carlos Hilliard, Harbin Combee,

Kim Lawrence, Gina Powell, and Sergeant Robert Parker, all of the Homicide Special Victims Unit at the time of the offense. He also cited the efforts of MPD Evidence Technicians Officer Jay Gregory, Officer John Holder and Officer George Klein of the Forensic Services Division. In addition, Mr. Machen praised those who worked on the case from the U.S. Attorney's Office, including Marcia Rinker of the Victim Witness Assistance Unit, Paralegal Specialists Sandra Lane and Sharon Newman, and Assistant U.S. Attorney John Soroka, who prosecuted the case.

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